

# The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Anaphoras of Byzantine St. Basil and St. John Chrysostom

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In the Eastern Orthodox Christian Church, there are currently two main liturgies celebrated during the church year. The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom is celebrated nearly every Sunday with a few exceptions. These exceptions occur during the first five Sundays of Lent, Holy Thursday, the eves of Christmas, Pascha, Theophany, and the Feastday of St. Basil when the Byzantine Divine Liturgy of St. Basil is celebrated. In both of these liturgies, there is a consecratory eucharistic prayer called the anaphora during which the bread and wine become the body and blood of Jesus Christ. In reading the anaphoras of St. John Chrysostom and of St. Basil it appears that the Holy Spirit has different roles within the two. It is this concept that shall be investigated further to answer the question, "What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the anaphoras of St. Basil and of St. John Chrysostom?"

It is important to first understand that these two anaphoras originate from two different liturgical families. The Anaphora of St. John Chrysostom is from the West Syrian or Antiochian liturgical family. Included in this family of liturgies one also finds the Liturgy of St. James, the Liturgy of the 12 Apostles, etc. The core of Chrysostom's anaphora appears to be derived from the Liturgy of the 12 Apostles and probably was adopted by Chrysostom for use in Antioch.<sup>1</sup> The Byzantine Anaphora of St. Basil is also classified as West Syrian, but this particular eucharistic prayer is derived from the Egyptian Anaphora of St. Basil which is of the Alexandrian

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<sup>1</sup> R.C.D. Jasper and G.J. Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1990), pgs. 129-30.

family. The Byzantine Anaphora of St. Basil is a reworking of this Alexandrian anaphora by the West Syrian school. Therefore, these two anaphoras are separate entities. St. John Chrysostom did not just simply "whittle down" the Byzantine Anaphora of St. Basil.

In a comparative reading of the two anaphoras, one immediately notices that Byzantine St. Basil contains a rich trinitarian theology. It appears to be based on a theology of revelation that provides a description of the relation of the Father to the Son and the Son to the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup> The key to understanding this lies in the fact when St. Basil originally wrote the text of his Alexandrian anaphora, he was deep into the Pneumatomachian controversy.<sup>3</sup> The Pneumatomachians argued against the divinity of the Holy Spirit and it was St. Basil who wrote On The Holy Spirit to defend the full divinity of the Holy Spirit. This also influenced the theological elaborations seen in his anaphora and includes the assignment of various roles to the Holy Spirit.

St. Basil's anaphora states that the source of sanctification and life for all spiritual creatures is the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup> It states that through the Son

"...the Holy Spirit was revealed, the spirit of truth, the grace of sonship, the pledge of the inheritance to come, the first fruits of eternal good things, lifegiving power, [and] the fountain of sanctification...."

Later on in the text of the anaphora it states that Jesus "...cleansed us with water and sanctified us by the Holy Spirit." It is the Holy Spirit who sanctifies us at baptism and the fruit of that sanctification is our sharing in the sonship of the Divine Son; this is simply a restatement of the

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<sup>2</sup> Hans-Joachim Schulz, *The Byzantine Liturgy: Symbolic Structure and Faith Expression*, Tr. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Pueblo Publishing, 1986), pg. 146.

<sup>3</sup> *Essays on Early Eastern Eucharistic Prayers*, ed. Paul F. Bradshaw (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1997), pgs. 122-24.

<sup>4</sup> Schulz, pg. 146.

Pauline theology of the Spirit in Romans and Galatians.<sup>5</sup>

Along with sanctification, another one of the important roles of the Holy Spirit in Basil's anaphora is the empowerment of those who are gathered at the liturgy. The Holy Spirit is the one,

"...by whose enabling the whole rational and spiritual Creation does You [the Father] service and renders You the unending doxology; for all things are Your servants."

We are able to worship the Father because He (the Father) is revealed through the Son in the Spirit to the Church. Reciprocally, because of the Holy Spirit, the people, when they come together as the Church, are united into "fellowship with the one Holy Spirit" as the one ecclesial Body of Christ and offer worship in the Spirit through the Son to the Father.<sup>6</sup>

A third role of the Holy Spirit is the ongoing deification of the worshippers. The epiclesis, the invocation of the Holy Spirit on the bread and wine, asks the Father that His "Holy Spirit come upon us...." By doing this we are asking for what we have already received at chrismation which is the gift of the Holy Spirit which transforms us into the likeness of the Son<sup>7</sup> and offers to us divine sonship. This also illustrates an important liturgical connection between our baptism and our participation in the eucharistic liturgy. Because of the Holy Spirit, as Nicholas Cabasilas states, "The clay [our body] is no longer clay when it has received the royal likeness, but is already the Body of the King." In other words, the Holy Spirit shares His holiness

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<sup>5</sup> Louis Bouyer, *Eucharist*, Tr. Charles Underhill Quinn (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), pg. 297.

<sup>6</sup> *Essays*, pg. 127.

<sup>7</sup> Stanley M. Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Eastern Christian Traditions* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1989), pg. 76.

with the saints so that they may have communion with God.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, in the Anaphora of St. Basil, we ask the Father that the Holy Spirit

"...may come upon us and upon these gifts set forth, and bless them and sanctify them and show (*anadeixai*) this bread to be the precious body of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ. And this cup to be the precious blood of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ...."

Here the epiclesis has little if any notion of a consecratory moment of change of the gifts. Rather, it is the Holy Spirit that comes from the Father to reveal the Son to the Church so that it may partake of the Son. The Church offers, or shows, the antitypes of Christ's Body and Blood, the bread and wine, to the Father and asks Him in turn to show them to not be just symbols empty of content, but the real manifestation of the Body and Blood of Christ.<sup>9</sup>

Why is there no moment of consecration in this epiclesis? The reason is that the change of the gifts from bread and wine to Body and Blood occurs outside our earthly time in the new time of the Kingdom.<sup>10</sup> Christ has been offered once and for all. The function of the liturgy, through the power of the Holy Spirit, is to transform our earthly time into the heavenly time.<sup>11</sup> From the moment of the intention of the bread and wine to become the Body and Blood of Christ, the worshipping Church is involved in a single task of revealing, manifesting, and ascending to the divine banquet table of the kingdom of God.<sup>12</sup> It is at the fulfillment of this ascension of the Church that the Holy Spirit manifests to us worshipping believers the Body and Blood of Christ

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<sup>8</sup> as quoted in Burgess, pg. 76.

<sup>9</sup> Bouyer, pg. 299.

<sup>10</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1987), pg. 218.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*, pg. 219.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*, pg. 217.

in the antitypes of the bread and wine.

Turning to the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, we apparently find a different role played by the Holy Spirit. First of all, there is actually very little mention of the Holy Spirit in the anaphora. Like St. Basil's anaphora, the Anaphora of St. John Chrysostom is addressed to God the Father. Attached to the anaphora, appearing almost as afterthoughts, are mentionings of the Son and the Holy Spirit in the Trinitarian formula. Absent from the Anaphora of St. John Chrysostom is the detailed trinitarian theology of Basil and the expanded role of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit does play a major role, however, in the epiclesis of St. John Chrysostom's anaphora where the Father is asked to

"...send down your Holy Spirit on us and on these gifts set forth; and make this bread the precious body of your Christ, and that which is in this cup the precious blood of your Christ, changing (*metabalōn*) them by your Holy Spirit."

One sees the hint of an exact consecratory moment in the Divine Liturgy. It appears that the job of the Holy Spirit is simply to descend upon the bread and wine and sanctify them. He doesn't "show" or manifest the Divine Gifts in the antitypes as in Basil's anaphora, rather, the Father changes the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ through descent and operation of the Holy Spirit.<sup>13</sup>

At this point, the concept of change (*metabalōn*) must be further examined. Is there a tendency in the Anaphora of St. John Chrysostom towards an exact moment of consecration? At a brief look, one might think yes. It is possible that with the gradual replacement of the Anaphora of St. Basil with the Anaphora of St. John Chrysostom, the idea of a moment of change - a magical and liturgical "presto chango" - may have been introduced. This reflects a new development, for no longer is the anaphora seen as a single totality. Rather, there is the development of the idea that individual phases of the anaphora are beginning to have an

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<sup>13</sup> Bouyer, pg. 289.

individual meaning.<sup>1414</sup> Is this really true or does the anaphora of St. John Chrysostom reflect a deeper understanding despite the difference in using the term "change" (*metabalōn*) rather than the term "show" (*anadeixai*)?

Once again, it is important to remember that the Church is the Body of Christ. It is an organic living entity made alive by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the individual members that come together to make up the Church. With this in mind, one can take a word from the life sciences and apply it to the Body of Christ in an attempt to unify the understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in these two very different anaphoras. The word *metabolism* is derived from the same Greek word as *metabalōn*. In biology, metabolism is the sum of all of the biochemical reactions occurring in a living organism. It does not refer to one single biochemical reaction or change, but to the whole symphony of biochemistry that gives life to the body. So how does this apply to the Anaphora of St. John Chrysostom? It can apply for the very same reasons (described above) as "show" does for the Anaphora of St. Basil. The change of the gifts that occurs by the Holy Spirit is a transformation that is manifested outside of our realm of understanding of time. There is a "metabolism of consecration" which is the sum total of our corporate liturgical worship in the Spirit. The change that is mentioned in Chrysostom's anaphora can be thought of to refer to the moment when the fullness of the Church's worship is realized. There is no liturgical magic, but rather a final totality to our offering of the bread and the wine.

Thus, in both anaphoras the action of the liturgy is ascension and a complex summation of the interactions of the ecclesial Body of Christ, i.e. the Church. The Holy Spirit transfigures not only those in the Church, but also the bread and wine offered by the Church. So, there is a "metabolism of consecration" that begins in the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, as in the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil, with the very intention by the Church of the bread and wine

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<sup>14</sup> Schulz, pgs. 153-4.

becoming the Body and Blood of Christ. Corporate liturgical worship in the Spirit and this "metabolism of consecration" in both liturgies with their respective anaphoras leads to the final manifestation of the Body and Blood of Christ. In the metabolism of the human body, biochemical transformations occur which ultimately give life; in the "metabolism of consecration" the Holy Spirit brings about the fulfillment of the liturgical sacrifice and leads to a eucharistic transformation that ultimately gives life in Christ.